Mayor says he respects plan to change city ambulance service

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(June 30, 2007) — Rochester Mayor Robert Duffy is standing by his decision to support a committee recommendation to City Council changing ambulance service in Rochester from Rural Metro to Monroe Ambulance.

However, City Councilman Adam McFadden says changing ambulance services could cost Rochester hundreds of jobs — with no major improvement in city ambulance service.

Duffy said he "was quite surprised with the recommendations" made by the ad hoc panel convened at his request to recommend which company should provide ambulance services. "I have a long history and a positive working relationship with Rural Metro. I'm not aware of any negatives for (either) organization," Duffy said.

Still, Duffy said he's bound to respect the committee's decision because the committee comprises public safety, finance and legal professionals, including Fire Chief Floyd Madison, 911 Director John Merklinger, former Finance Director Vince Carfagna and Municipal Attorney Jeffrey Eichner.

"I would almost feel it would be an uncomfortable position to refute those that ran the process," Duffy said.

Duffy said committee members were adamant that Monroe Ambulance could better meet requirements of the city's Request for Proposal and said the committee was impressed by Monroe's technology capability to connect with 911 operators, its pledge to lower response times and Monroe's plans to purchase a fleet of new ambulances.

The company must also hire between 100 and 200 additional staff including EMTs to meet the required service capacity.

It's possible that at least some of those EMTs could come from Rural Metro if it isn't awarded the contract.

Rural Metro employs about 250 EMTs and 100 home healthcare aides and operates more than 30 ambulances in the city.

Since Monroe is about one-third the size of Rural Metro, it must buy new vehicles to meet contract requirements.

Duffy said he met face to face this week with officials from both services, and he admits he's concerned that Monroe's increased hiring won't prevent a net loss of jobs in the city.

He said Rural Metro officials have told him the company could pull out of Rochester if the three-year contract is awarded to Monroe Ambulance.

"I would hope that they would stay in and compete," Duffy said, noting that locally owned Monroe Ambulance has served Rochester for almost two decades, while Rural Metro held the larger market share.

McFadden, who admits his wife received excellent emergency care from Rural Metro in the past, supports Rural Metro.

"I don't think there is much difference between the two companies. The fallout is the loss of jobs and the potential closing of a business in Rochester. It doesn't make sense to me."

Duffy and McFadden agree there is very little difference in performance of the services.

However, one difference, said McFadden, is that the city's Request for Proposal requires that the company operate ambulances that are less than six years old, with less than 300,000 miles.

"Rural Metro was going to phase them in, and Monroe could do it from the jump. A new car could break down just like an old one. I didn't see any difference," McFadden said.

One difference is unionization — Rural Metro has a unionized workforce, Monroe Ambulance does not. Duffy said Monroe has said it is open "to the possibly of unionization."

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